



DANGANRONPA

**MAKOTO NAEGI
SECRET FILE**

Makoto Naegi's Worst Day Ever

Makoto Naegi's Worst Day Ever

Kazutaka Kodaka



This story takes place before everything began—before the students who would be made to participate in the academic coliseum had even enrolled in Kibougamine Academy. It’s a tale of something that happened before anything had happened yet.



“Before we dismiss,” the headmaster said, “I have one final announcement to make.”

He was seated at a large, round, wooden table in the center of a special conference room at Kibougamine Academy. Red carpet covered the entire floor, and the windows were adorned with thick curtains. The room had a solemnity to it—it felt more like something out of a historic hotel than a school.

“What, we’re not done yet?”

The four members of the Kibougamine Academy Board of Directors—who had assumed the meeting to be over and begun to rise from their seats—sat back down, making no effort to conceal their exasperation.

“So, what is this ‘announcement’ you have to make?”

“The Seventy-eighth Class’s Super Duper High School Luckster has been selected,” the headmaster responded confidently. Almost immediately, he was met with a chorus of disappointed sighs.

“Oh,” one of the old men said, “the loser’s throne has been filled, has it?”

The Super Duper High School Luckster was a title given to a single high-school student selected in a lottery held by Kibougamine Academy each year. The chosen student was unconditionally invited to enroll in the academy, and the Board of Directors referred to that slot as the “loser’s throne.” All four of them believed fortune to be no talent.

“What a waste of a seat,” one muttered.

“Are there *no* other talents out there more suitable to be researched?” complained another.

The Board of Directors had ultimate control over Kibougamine Academy—including the appointment of the headmaster—which meant that even he had to choose his words carefully, no matter how far off the mark the Board’s opinions were.

“With all due respect,” the headmaster said, peacefully voicing his objection, “I *do* believe fortune is a kind of talent.” On the inside, he was frustrated with how hard-headed they could be, but he made every effort not to let that come to the surface.

The headmaster had ambitions—he was working to accomplish a certain goal, and if he wanted any chance of achieving it, he could not allow himself to get on the Board of Directors’ bad side. On the other hand, he also had to be careful not to focus too much on trying to appease them and risk veering off track. So he decided he would elaborate on his beliefs in more detail than usual.

“At times, luck is capable of overshadowing even the most outstanding of talents and any degree of diligence, and for this reason, we, mankind, celebrate it—live in awe of it. It’s easy to dismiss luck as mere chance or happenstance, but I, personally, cannot ignore its effect. In order to determine for sure whether fortune is simply an unknowable

variable or an actual talent, we need samples—”

“As we’ve been saying time and time again,” interrupted one of the old men, “*fortune is no talent*. Luck is nothing more than an impression—a label applied after the fact when an event with a low probability of occurring takes place. The people who observed the event perceived it as luck, so they called it luck—simple as that. The fact of the matter is, the event took place because the natural order of things demanded it take place. No matter how improbable it may be, *if something has a chance of occurring, it will occur*.”

The headmaster gave a slight nod, then slowly made his response: “Are you sure that’s all there is to it, though?”

“What are you saying?”

“Remember last year’s Super Duper High School Luckster?”

As soon as the words left his mouth, the Board members’ expressions all shifted in unison—like he had just mentioned something taboo.

“If everything occurs because the natural order of things demands it so,” the headmaster continued, “then why do things always seem to happen that benefit him? I cannot look at that boy and tell myself that fortune is nothing more than how we perceive the outcome of an event.”

“But when it results in something like *that*...” one of the old men spat. All four members of the Board of Directors looked like they were sucking on lemons, as they had since the second the headmaster mentioned the previous year’s Super Duper High School Luckster.

He was, unquestionably, a very problematic student, constantly stirring up trouble and causing problems among his fellow students. The worst part of all was that he never had ill intentions. His presence in the school was a cause of great concern for the headmaster, but—

“Regardless,” he said, “we have no choice but to admit that his fortune is genuine—that it is worthy of being referred to as a ‘talent,’ do we not?”

The entire Board sat in silence, lacking the words to retort.

Eventually, one of them ran out of patience and said, leaning back in his chair as he did, “It seems you have no intention of changing your mind. Do as you please.”

The headmaster immediately bowed his head, as though he had been waiting for exactly those words.

“Thank you very much,” he said, slowly lifting his head, then reached down and picked up a sheet of paper sitting atop the wooden table. On it was printed the profile of the student who had been selected as the Seventy-eighth Class’s Super Duper High School Luckster. It contained detailed information even the subject themselves had long since forgotten.

And how, exactly, was Kibougamine Academy able to acquire this information?

That went without saying.

It wouldn’t be Kibougamine Academy if it couldn’t.

It was a school that only admitted students with special talents, grooming them to shoulder the country’s hope for the future. Its alumni held vital posts in every field, and it had special government backing. Trying to think of the academy like any ordinary organization was an exercise in futility.

Profile in-hand, the headmaster resumed his announcement.

“This year, Kibougamine Academy has selected a single name, by fair and unbiased lottery, from all currently enrolled high-school students nationwide, to invite to attend the school as the Super Duper High School Luckster.” The Board of Directors had long since lost interest, but the headmaster continued anyway. “The name we have drawn—”

The headmaster dropped his gaze to the sheet of paper in his hand, and read for the Board the name written there—the name of a certain high-school girl.



“This is *not* my lucky day,” Makoto Naegi muttered through a sigh as he headed for the nearest convenience store.

Makoto was a perfectly average high-school student attending a perfectly average high school—something he was painfully aware of, and something he was often reminded of by his friends and family. While, on some level, he *was* somewhat dispirited by it, he also knew good and well that there was nothing he could do to change it. The very fact that he felt that way about his average self pretty much cemented his averageness.

That day, however, was different.

That day, Makoto was most certainly *not* normal. He was a far cry from average in one specific way.

To put it simply, that day, he was incredibly unlucky—which he began to realize after school had let out.

For the first time in a long time, the skies were clear, and Makoto was in an unusually good mood. Feeling as though something good was on the horizon, he decided he would take a different route home than usual, go for a walk.

It can be nice to take a detour every once in a while, he thought—just ever so slightly different from usual. And that tiny change in routine was the start of all his misfortune.

After a short while, Makoto passed by a large park. There, he just happened to run into one of his friends—a classmate. That friend was with a group of his own friends—mostly people Makoto had never met before—and they were getting ready to play a round of rock-paper-scissors to decide who got to go buy snacks for everyone. Makoto’s friend invited him to join in. He could tell the invitation was made on a whim from the look on his friend’s face and the way he was acting.

Normally, Makoto would have rejected the offer and gone on his merry way, but he decided to participate, figuring if he was doing things differently that day, he might as well go all out.

Oddly enough, he was almost certain he wouldn’t lose—not only were there nearly ten people playing, the weather was incredible too. Nothing could possibly go wrong.

The game was decided in a single round.

Makoto lost. He played scissors, and everyone else played rock.

The look of utter surprise on all their faces was all he needed to know the game wasn't rigged.

"Man," his friend said, amazed, "that's actually pretty damn impressive. Talk about bad luck."

"Having impressively bad luck doesn't make me feel any better," Makoto said, slumping his shoulders.

"Don't feel so bad," his friend said, patting him on the shoulder and handing him a small wad of cash. "I'll take a cola and some fried chicken!"

"Got it," Makoto said with a bitter smile. "Guess that's all the cheering up I'll get from you, huh?" He pulled out a sheet of paper, hurriedly scribbled down everyone's orders, took their money—all the while cursing his misfortune.

Ten minutes later, Makoto stepped out of the convenience store and onto the sidewalk, an overstuffed plastic bag hanging from each hand.

"C-Crap... this is heavy."

Compared to other students his age, Makoto wasn't the best built or most athletic of high-school boys. Having to carry almost ten people's drinks and snacks from the store back to the park all by himself wasn't going to be easy.

Think about something pleasant, he told himself in an attempt to take his mind off the task at hand. The first thing that came to mind was that night's TV schedule. Someone he used to go to school with—someone he knew very well, but who did not know him—was supposedly making an appearance on a music program airing that evening. He had been looking forward to watching it for several days.

Man, I can't wait, he thought—and in that very same moment, he heard the sound of something snapping and almost lost his balance.

"Whoa!" he cried, his feet instinctively pressing hard against the concrete in an attempt to avoid falling.

Once he had caught his balance, Makoto realized that his hands felt lighter—that the sudden change in weight was what had caused him to stumble in the first place.

"Huh?" He looked down at his hands, finally understanding what had happened. The bottoms of both plastic bags had ripped, and everything inside was scattered all over the sidewalk. "No way..."

While it was logical enough that good weather didn't necessarily mean good things would happen, he couldn't help but feel like things were going excessively bad for him. Plastic grocery bags didn't just randomly break on people. Unless, say, the clerk accidentally sliced the whole stack with a box cutter when he was unpacking the bags. And yet, it had still happened.

Anyone who saw him in that moment would know exactly how far on Lady Luck's bad side Makoto was that day.

"Oh, come *on*," he muttered, desperately scrambling to collect the snacks, plastic bottles, and aluminum cans that had scattered every which way. "Why did this have to happen to me?"

If, by some dramatic twist of fate, a girl wandered onto the scene and offered him her assistance, he would have gladly put all the misfortune that led up to that moment behind him. But *nobody* else was using that particular sidewalk—let alone any nice, helpful girls. The road along which the sidewalk was built was reasonably large, but he was currently in a residential area near a park a fair distance from the train station, so it was no real surprise there wasn't much foot traffic. However, Makoto couldn't help but think his bad luck was to blame.

A short while later, Makoto finished collecting the strewn goods. Some of the drinks had even rolled off the sidewalk and into the street, which had made his job that much harder, but he was finally done—or so he thought.

Looking down at the array of items on the sidewalk, Makoto tilted his head.

“Is this... everything?”

Somehow, he felt like there was less there than what he had bought. Thinking he might have missed something, Makoto spun around, surveying the area.

There, he saw an old man with a long beard sitting on a bench just outside the convenience store.

I didn't realize there was anyone there, he thought.

The old man looked away from Makoto, dropping his gaze to his own feet, then crouched forward and picked up the can of coffee lying there. Right before Makoto's eyes, he pulled the tab, opening the can and, without hesitation, lifted it to his lips.

Hey, is that—

No, it couldn't be, Makoto thought as he approached the old man.

“E-Excuse me,” he said, timidly.

“Hmm?” grunted the old man as he took another gulp and looked up at Makoto.

“Um, I apologize if I'm wrong about this, but is that coffee, by any chance...” he probed.

“Hmm? So this was yours, son?” the man said, a look of surprise rising to his face. Then, he burst out laughing. “Haha, sorry about that!”

“Wait, so it really—” Makoto said, dumbfounded.

Without even the slightest trace of shame on his face, the old man said, “Ah, how should I put this? It just, y'know, found its way to me, like it was always meant to be. I couldn't help myself.”

“Y-Yes you could have!” Makoto shouted back, instinctively objecting to the man's absurd logic. But the man's bright smile told him he was fighting a fruitless battle, so he dropped his shoulders, forfeiting with a heavy sigh. “Whatever, it doesn't matter.”

Apparently feeling at least somewhat bad about what he had done at the sight of Makoto's utter dejection, the old man said, a trace of worry in his voice, “Hey now, son. Was my drinking your coffee really that big of a shock?”

“It wasn't just that,” Makoto muttered through a sigh. “This is just *not* my lucky day. For the past, like, half-hour, bad things have constantly been happening. Why me? Why now? Is it karma or something?”

In response, the old man did something Makoto was not expecting: he chuckled.

“Huh?” Makoto said, looking up in surprise.

“Karma's got nothing to do with it, son. Believing that good things will happen to you just because you're a good person is senseless.”

“B-But—”

“Fact of the matter is,” he continued, not giving Makoto a chance to object, “I don't believe in karma for a damn second. If you're good you'll be rewarded, or if something bad happens, it's because you did something bad—that's all a load of crap. That whole way of thinking is nothing more than vain hope, a futile attempt to control fate by assigning

reason to it. But the reality of it is, if you're unlucky, you're unlucky whether you're a saint or a sinner, and the exact same goes for if you're lucky. I've been around the block more than once, so I know what I'm talking about."

Makoto sighed again, completely clueless as to why the old man was telling him this. But the man paid him no mind, continuing his lecture.

"In short, no one has any control over their fortune. As hard as we might try, as skilled as we might be, we can't fight fate. Nothing good can come of either leaning too hard on luck *or* resisting it. Whether our luck is good or bad, all we can do is accept it for what it is. That's the conclusion I've drawn after all these years," the old man said, nodding in approval of his own words.

"Um," Makoto said, finally finding enough courage to interject.

"What is it, son?" the old man said with an impish grin. "Don't agree?"

"No, it's not that I disagree..." he said, hesitating. "A-Are you, um, trying to convert me to your religion... or something?"

For a brief moment, the old man's mouth hung open, and then he burst out laughing. "I guess a child like you wouldn't be ready to hear that yet, would you?"

"I'm not a child anymore."

"Nope, you're still a child," the old man said, shaking his head. "Children act for themselves; adults act for others—that's the difference between the two. Which one are you, son? A kid who acts for no one but himself, right? That's normal, though. Start worrying about others at your age, and you won't make it to see mine."

Having made his judgment, the old man stood up, handed the half-empty coffee can to Makoto, and said, "Well, you got a long road ahead of you. I'm sure you'll have your share of problems, son, but good luck."

"Um, thanks," Makoto said, perplexed. Then the old man trotted off, a satisfied grin on his face.

Makoto stood there, dumbfounded, watching the bearded man's back shrink into the distance, but with each passing moment, the whole situation felt more and more peculiar to him. Why in the world had he thanked the old man? And what was he supposed to do with a half-drunk can of coffee?

What it all came down to, he thought, was that the old man had deftly managed to blow him off.

However, something the man had said *had* struck a chord with Makoto: "Accept it for what it is," he had proclaimed, almost preachingly.

He had a point. There was no benefit in letting yourself get dragged around by an incomprehensible force of nature like luck, and getting angry or crying about it wouldn't change anything. In which case, just giving up and accepting it as part of life was probably the best option.

Leave the unpleasant memories for the past. Dragging them around like a ball-and-chain was just dumb.

That notion made Makoto feel just a little bit better about himself.

"Yep," he said, "that's what I'll do."

His optimism, which allowed him to so readily switch gears emotionally, was one of Makoto Naegi's positive traits.

That said, he didn't really have time to wallow in his misery—he was still in the middle of an errand. His friend's group would almost certainly be expecting him any second now, which meant he needed to head into the store, get a

couple bags that *wouldn't* break, and hurry back to the park.

His immediate plans all sorted out, Makoto made to toss the coffee into a nearby trash can—and that was when he saw it.

“Huh?”

On the bench, there sat a large feature phone with a “safe driving” charm in place of a strap. He guessed it belonged to the old man who had just left. After picking the phone up off the bench, Makoto spun around to look for the man, who had evidently managed to cover a considerable distance in the short time since he had left.

“Hey, mister!” Makoto called out for him, but the old man didn’t appear to have heard. For someone his age, he could sure move.

Makoto was faced with a dilemma.

Should he go after the old man? Or should he let him be and finish his own errand?

He looked down at the phone in his hand, then over to the pile of groceries sitting on the sidewalk. Phone, sidewalk, phone, sidewalk.

“Oh, fine!” he muttered, then started to run. Makoto had never been the kind of person who could *not* do the right thing if he had the chance. “Hold on, mister!” he shouted at the top of his lungs, but as luck would have it—or, perhaps, as luck *wouldn't* have it—a bus drove past the old man at that same moment, blocking out the sound of Makoto’s voice.

When the old man caught sight of the bus, he suddenly broke into a jog—straight for the bus stop. The bus and the man arrived at the stop at almost exactly the same time. A second later, the bus let out a buzz and its doors slid open. The man climbed aboard.

“H-Hold on!” Makoto cried, but the old man disappeared into the bus, not a glance in his direction. “Oh, *come on!*” he spat, sprinting as fast as he could manage. By that point, his body was too busy pushing him forward to say anything else. He clenched his teeth, held his breath, stuck his chin out, and desperately moved his legs.

The bus emitted a second buzz—warning that the doors were about to close.

Through his sprinting and the intense shaking of his field of vision, Makoto watched the doors slide shut.

And just seconds before it clicked into place, he leapt through the gap and onto the bus.

Gasping for breath, he fell forward, his hands landing on his bent knees. He could hear his heart pounding in his ears.

“I— I made it...” he gasped, between heaves.

Indeed, he *had* made it.

He let out a sigh of relief, then paused for several moments to catch his breath. Once his breathing was relatively steady, he lifted his head and took a look around the bus. Several passengers were staring at him curiously. Among them was the bearded man from before, sitting at the very back of the bus with a startled look on his face.

“Thank goodness,” Makoto said with another sigh. “You forgot this, mister,” he said, extending his arm toward the man, phone in hand. As he made to take the first step toward the old man’s seat, he tripped over his own foot. “Whoa!”

The bus was still stopped, so it hadn't been because of that. He hadn't tripped on anything or slipped on anything either. More than likely, it was because he hadn't run like that in some time. Or perhaps it was just his bad luck rearing its ugly head again.

Crap! he thought as his body began to fall forward. He reached out, entirely on instinct, and grabbed onto something. The next second, he heard a sharp *tear*, and then he was on the floor. Whatever he had grabbed lessened the impact of his fall considerably—a small stroke of luck in an otherwise unfortunate situation.

However, he hadn't been completely saved from the impact. His right shoulder and side stung, and he must have hit his head, because he was seeing stars through his barely open eyes.

Or, at least, that's what Makoto thought—but he was wrong. The glimmering he saw was not an illusion, but real, physical light shining through the bus's windows and refracting through the jewels scattered across the floor.

"What?" Makoto mumbled, unable to comprehend what he was seeing, incapable of making even the slightest amount of sense out of the scene before him.

Why are there jewels on the floor of the bus?

And then, a shadow appeared beside Makoto, who was still lying, confused, on the hard ground. The shadow belonged to a diligent-looking businessman at the front of the bus who had just stood up. In a calm, professional tone of voice, the man said, "Don't move. Stay right where you are, everyone." He set his torn bag on the seat, reached into his jacket pocket, and pulled out an army knife with the same natural, smooth motion as someone pulling out a business card.

It was certainly a stroke of luck that Makoto had grabbed onto what he had when he fell.

Another stroke of *bad* luck.



Jutarou Akafuku hated his name.

Particularly his surname, which meant "red blessing." Every time he introduced himself, someone would inevitably tell him that he had been blessed with such a wonderful name. He'd gotten so tired of hearing it that he'd begun using an alias around unfamiliar faces.

People often say that men are defined by their names, and indeed, in his thirty-two years on Earth, Jutarou had never once thought of himself as unlucky. In fact, he had been blessed with abnormally good luck. By the very nature of his work, he had found himself in a number of dangerous situations in the past, but every time—without fail—a series of fortunate flukes guided him to safety.

While his luck could be considered one of his strengths, he wasn't fond of admitting it.

Rather, allowing himself to end up in situations where the outcome was in fate's hands was unacceptable to him. He knew good and well that, in his line of work, even the smallest of slip-ups could mean disaster.

Jutarou was a thief.

The most important thing to him when he was on a job was reducing the potential influence of forces outside his control—luck, other people—to an absolute minimum. In his mind, a thorough, well crafted plan was the cornerstone of any job. He always formulated and executed his plans by himself, and any job for which that wasn't possible, he wouldn't take. There was nothing worse than being betrayed by a partner who let his greed get to his head, and besides, Jutarou didn't need anyone slowing him down. And he *especially* didn't need to be asking for help from on high.

Naturally, his current job was no different. He had planned everything and put that plan into action all by himself.

His target had been a small jewelry store in a nearby shopping district. Jutarou had received information that, despite looking run-down, the store had a hidden stash of extremely valuable jewels. And to top it off, the owner was a bit of a penny-pincher, so security was light.

It was an incredible opportunity—the kind that you only ever got once or twice.

So Jutarou crafted an intricate, but bold, plan, and then he went through with it. Naturally—as far as he was concerned—everything went without a hitch, exactly as it was supposed to. His plan was perfect, leaving no room whatsoever for outside interference. And there had been none.

Spoils tucked away in his bag, he calmly stepped onto the bus. Jutarou liked to make use of public transportation as much as possible while on a job. It was easier to blend into the crowd in a bustling city by riding a bus or train than it was driving a car or motorcycle, and by dressing like a businessman on the job, he practically disappeared.

The disguise worked, too. Not a person on that bus gave him a second look as he took an open seat at the front.

Finally certain he had completed his work, Jutarou let out a small sigh of relief. As the bus vibrated gently beneath him, he silently basked in the satisfaction of a job well done.

And then, a sick twist of fate made quick work of everything he had accomplished. Only, it wasn't *his* luck that laid everything to waste—rather, he was just caught in the crossfire of some teenage boy's misfortune. Some boy who just happened to climb onto the same bus as him. It was a stroke of bad luck so overwhelming that even Jutarou who, up to that point, had been blessed with such incredibly good luck, was helpless to prevent it.

Glaring down at the boy lying on the floor of the bus, the boy who had dragged Jutarou into his misfortune, Jutarou calmly rose from his seat and said, "Don't move. Stay right where you are, everyone." He then pulled an army knife from his jacket pocket and waved it around for all the passengers to see.

No problem, he told himself. There's still more than enough time to repair my plan.



Nothing made sense. His thoughts had become so entangled it felt as if his mind had turned into a giant ball of yarn.

What's going on? What's going on? What's going on?

Makoto desperately struggled to make sense of the situation. He cranked his brain—which was on the verge of meltdown—into full gear and tried to remember how he had ended up where he was.

The skies were clear, and he was feeling good, so he decided to take a different route home than usual. Passing by a park along the way, he ran into a classmate, who invited him to participate in a game of rock-paper-scissors to decide who got to buy snacks for everyone. As luck would have it, Makoto lost in a single round, and on his way back with the goods, both plastic bags broke open, spilling the drinks and food all over the sidewalk and street. While collecting the scattered drinks, he met an old man on a bench, and after a short conversation, the man left. But he forgot his phone, and Makoto chased him onto this bus in an attempt to return it. In another stroke of bad luck, he tripped over his own feet and grabbed onto something attempting to catch his balance.

And that was how it had happened.

Even after retracing his steps, the situation still didn't make much sense. There were jewels scattered on the floor of the bus around him, and a perfectly normal-looking businessman was holding an army knife above his head. "No problem. There's nothing to worry about," the businessman—Jutarou Akafuku—muttered to himself. He appeared to be thinking very hard about something. "I just have to formulate another plan and then go through with it and everything will be just fine."

"E-Excuse me," Makoto said hesitantly, intending to apologize to the man standing over him. He had no idea if it was the right thing to do in that situation—his mind was too fried to make that call.

The next second, the man with the knife was glaring down at Makoto. His voice left him. Those were not the eyes of a hardworking businessman—they were the cold, harsh eyes of a man who wouldn't hesitate to cause others harm for his own benefit.

"Could I get you to stand up for me, please?" Jutarou asked gently. His voice and his eyes gave two very different impressions.

"...What?"

"I said, would you please stand up?" he repeated, and in that very same moment, Makoto found himself with a knife mere centimeters from his forehead. All Makoto had managed to see was Jutarou begin to lean forward, and the next thing he knew, he was staring down the blade of the man's weapon. "You'll do that for me, won't you?" he asked, slowly lifting the knife pointed at Makoto's head.

As the knife rose, so too did Makoto's body—as though the two were connected by an invisible string. His teeth were rattling audibly. Without moving his head, he threw his gaze around the inside of the bus, begging for help with his eyes. But the passengers just sat there, frozen, faces pale as sheets. Even if he *had* been able to form words, to ask them for help directly, he could tell that nobody would have come to his aid.

Accept it for what it is.

Again, the bearded man's words echoed in the back of Makoto's mind. But it was futile. How in the *world* was he supposed to "accept" this preposterous situation at face value? He hadn't the slightest idea. And the man who had given him those words showed no sign of coming to his rescue—in fact, his head was drooped down and his eyes shut.

Is he pretending to be asleep?

Unbelievable. Did he *seriously* think he'd be able to fake-sleep his way out of this?

While Makoto's mind was busy occupying itself with unimportant trivialities—

“Come on, get moving,” Jutarou said, shoving Makoto from behind.

“Wha—?” Makoto gasped as he stumbled back to the front of the bus.

Jutarou pointed his knife at the driver, who was still in the driver’s seat, and said, “Stand up slowly, and step away from the wheel for me, would you?”

As if in protest, the driver squeezed his lips shut, frowning at the man with the knife.

Jutarou took a deep breath, then let it all out at once. “I asked you to step away from the wheel,” he repeated, as intimidatingly calm as ever. “Please, don’t make this any harder than it has to be. Don’t think I don’t know there’s a button somewhere you can press to alert someone on the outside in case of an emergency. Should, for some reason, you decide to play the hero and push that button”—he pressed the knife up against Makoto’s throat—“I can’t guarantee this boy’s life.”

In an instant, all the color drained from Makoto’s sweat-drenched face.

“So, what’ll it be?” Jutarou asked the driver.

“O-Okay!” the driver said, standing up and lifting the bar that separated the driver’s seat from the rest of the bus. After he had stepped out into the aisle, Jutarou turned his attention back to Makoto.

“Now,” he said, “you sit down in the driver’s seat.”

“Huh?”

“You’re my hostage,” he said, then shoved Makoto into the driver’s seat. Makoto grunted as he fell backwards. Jutarou then lowered the bar, locking it into place and completing his makeshift cage.

Makoto didn’t understand what Jutarou’s intentions were. He wondered, completely inappropriately, if he had any business sitting in such an important seat.

Jutarou, on the other hand, was preparing to execute the plan he had been working on up until that point. It was a straightforward, spur-of-the-moment plan, but simplicity was best when trouble struck.

First, he made the driver—the person who posed the greatest threat—collect the scattered jewels and put them in a backpack stolen from one of the passengers. While the driver was doing that, Jutarou kept close watch on the passengers, ensuring none of them did anything that would compromise him. It probably wasn’t necessary, though, considering everyone was still paralyzed with fear; no one made any attempts to pull out their phones and call for help or signal to someone outside the bus. But just to be absolutely sure, Jutarou said to everyone there, “For your own good, no heroics, all right? I haven’t stolen anything of yours, so this whole thing has nothing to do with any of you. If you all just zip it and keep your noses out of my business, it will continue to have nothing to do with you. Simple as that.”

The passengers sat, trembling in silence, just waiting for everything to be over—all of them except one.

With one eye half-open, he watched the events on the bus unfold, waiting patiently for the bus-jacker to let his guard down. His chance would probably come when the driver finished gathering the jewels, thought the bearded old man. He was almost positive that the robber—who was currently watching his surroundings like a hawk—would direct his attention to his loot once it came back to him.

A second later, the driver, on his hands and knees, muttered up to the thief, “Umm, I’ve got everything...”

Hearing that, Jutarou twisted the corner of his lips up and yanked the bulky backpack from the driver's hands.

Now! thought the old man. His eyes shot open, and he leapt from his seat with a swiftness unbelievable for his age.

"Wha—" uttered Jutarou as he lost his balance. The old man had latched onto his back.

"You fool, showing your back to me. I'm a fifth-dan in kendo!"

Somehow managing to keep his footing, Jutarou spat back at the old man, his previously calm and collected tone of voice gone without a trace. "Wh-What the hell does kendo have to do with anything?! You're just holding onto my damn arms!"

Jutarou had a point, but there was no denying the old man's fearlessness and quickness to act was the result of many years of martial arts.

The bearded man grabbed Jutarou's right hand—the one with the army knife—with both of his hands, squeezing tight and not letting the thief get free.

"Graaaaaaaah! Let go, goddammit!" he wailed, twisting and struggling with all his might.

Sitting at the front of the bus, listening to the screaming, Makoto's body trembled convulsively—not in fear, though, but the exact opposite.

I have to help him! I have to help the old man!

In that instant, an intense drive boiled up inside him. His eyes were no longer those of the timid, abnormally normal high-school boy everyone usually saw, but those of someone who was prepared to fight to the bitter end, no matter how tough things got or outmatched he might be. Before his mind had the chance to shift into gear, his body was already in motion, driven entirely by instinct—the very core of what made him Makoto Naegi.

He placed his hands on something beside the driver's seat, and he planted his feet firmly on the ground, rising from the seat.

Something didn't feel right.

And a moment later, the whole world was rushing past him.

In his hurried attempt to stand, Makoto had placed his hands on the bus's gear stick, and his foot on the gas, shifting the bus into drive and sending it barreling forward.

Makoto shouted in surprise—and so did the rest of the passengers. The inside of the bus echoed with a cacophony of screams and cries.

As the bus steamed forward, Jutarou struggled to catch his balance, but he only managed it for a second. He and the old man on his back were soon on the ground and separated from one another.

"Wh-What are you doing, son?!" the man shouted toward the front of the bus.

"I— I don't— I don't know!"

Anyone observing the scene would have placed the blame for the blunder squarely on Makoto's shoulders, but to him, it seemed like nothing more than another stroke of bad luck. He'd never driven a car before—how was he supposed to know that the thing he just happened to rest his hands on was the gear stick and the area he just happened to set his feet was where the gas pedal was? Besides, wasn't the driver supposed to set the emergency brake anytime he got up out of his seat?

Normally, yes, but the situation they were in was anything but normal. In the pressure of the moment, the driver had forgotten to set the E-brake when Jutarou forced him out of his seat, resulting in the day's chain of bad luck continuing unbroken. The misfortune shattered his determination like a baseball crashing through a window, catching not just him, but everyone on the bus in its crossfire.

The bus continued to rocket forward, the outside world nothing but a blur through the windows. The roar of the engine, the howling of the wind, the screams of the passengers. A single voice rose up above the noise.

"The brakes, son! Step on the brakes!" cried the old man, bringing Makoto back to his senses. He lifted his foot off the gas, then slammed it back down on the pedal beside it. The bus screeched to a halt, and Makoto could have sworn the back end had risen into the air ever so slightly as it did.

Makoto shrieked as the bus threw him from the driver's seat and into the aisle. On his way out, though, his hand hit something—a button on a panel beside the driver's seat. As soon as he realized what he had done, a woman's voice filled the bus.

"The doors are about to open. Please watch your step."

The intercom clicked off, and then the bus's door slid open.

Jutarou was the first to react. Jewel-filled bag in hand, he dashed to the front of the bus and leapt through the door.

"What are you doing, son?!" the old man shouted, still on the floor. "Go after him!" His face contorted in pain—evidently he wasn't able to stand himself. He must have hurt something when he fell.

Makoto, who was lying on his back beneath the bar separating the driver's seat from the aisle, could see the old man looking straight at him, but it took Makoto a few seconds to realize the man's words were directed at him.

"Get moving, son!" the bearded man said, and it finally clicked.

"Huh? Me?"

"Yes you! Who do you think let him get away?!"

Who do I think let him get away? Does he mean me? he thought, perplexed. The passengers were all looking at him expectantly. Makoto was dumbfounded. *They seriously want me to go after him?* He desperately looked around the bus, trying to find the driver. He figured that if anyone would go after the thief, the driver would, but the driver was unconscious, slouched against the back seat. He must have hit his head when Makoto had slammed on the brakes.

This was seriously *not* Makoto Naegi's lucky day.

"O-Oh god..." Makoto muttered, his face twisting in fear and nervousness.

"Don't worry," the old man said, pointing to the army knife under the seat beside him. "He's unarmed!"

The man was right—that *was* the knife Jutarou had been holding earlier. Which meant he was, in fact, unarmed. But that didn't change a thing; Makoto was just as unarmed. Assuming he would be fine simply because neither of them had a weapon was ridiculous. If the two of them ended up brawling, Makoto was at a clear disadvantage physically—a fact he knew all too well.

Don't worry? How exactly am I supposed to do that? Makoto complained at the old man in his mind. But as he cursed, he climbed to his feet and headed toward the door. He was practically in a frenzy by that point, his body moving all on its own without any concern for the consequences. How else could he have not succumbed to such an

outrageous chain reaction of misfortune, accepting it for what it was?

I don't care what happens anymore! Makoto thought and leapt down the stairs toward the door—slamming face first into someone and rebounding backwards, landing hard on one of the steps. “Owowowowow...” he muttered, then lifted his head to figure out what in the world had just happened. There, he saw a man in a white helmet and a navy blue uniform on the ground, leaning back against the guardrail.

Makoto recognized that uniform—the man was a mailman. The mailman had seen the bus suddenly rush forward, then come to an equally sudden stop, so he had decided to see if something was wrong. When he tried to board the bus, he collided with Makoto.

“S-Something didn’t seem right,” the mailman said, rubbing his neck. He must have hit his head on the guardrail when Makoto bumped into him. He was wearing a helmet, so he had avoided any serious injury, but his neck appeared to be in some pain. “So, is there some kind of problem?”

“U-Um, uh...” As Makoto debated whether he should explain what was going on or ask the mailman if he was all right—

“Damn, am I lucky,” came another voice. Makoto turned his head toward the source of the voice, and there he saw Jutarou Akafuku mounting the mailman’s motorbike, which had been left beside the guardrail a short distance away. “I make these intricate plans because I hate random chance screwing things up, but still I end up relying on it,” he said, calmly gripping the handlebars of the bright red mailbike. “Well, at least my luck is good, I guess.”

His luck was good indeed. Because the postman had noticed the bus acting strangely, and because he had crashed into Makoto, Jutarou had acquired an escape vehicle.

“Oh, and that goes for you just as much as it does me, boy,” Jutarou said to Makoto.

“Huh?”

“If I were to get arrested because of *you*, boy, that’s a grudge I would *never* let go of.” While Jutarou’s voice sounded somewhat self-defeating, his face bore an expression of pure disdain. His expression would send a shiver up anyone’s spine—he looked like a starving wild dog that had finally found some prey.

Makoto couldn’t move his body an inch—neither to run nor to fight. He just stood there, frozen in place—the prey about to be devoured.

Seeing that, Jutarou chuckled to himself. As someone who tried his hardest to minimize external influences on his plans, he would never normally make a threat like that. But in this case, he couldn’t help himself. He *had* to get some form of payback—as insignificant as it may be—on the intractable child standing before him. The boy who threw wrench after wrench into Jutarou’s carefully constructed plans—and not even intentionally. Purely by luck. Jutarou would *not* stand for that. And so he threatened the boy, hoping to shake him up—if just a little.

Of course, the threat was empty. Jutarou was unlikely to ever run into the boy again. Given that the boy knew he was a thief, crossing paths with him would cause nothing but trouble, and Jutarou had no interest whatsoever in being dragged through the mud by misfortune ever again. While his good luck may have come out on top this time, the last thing he wanted to do was try his luck a second time.

Taken another way, it could be said that Jutarou was afraid of Makoto’s misfortune, but the thought never crossed

his mind—or, rather, he endeavored to prevent it from doing so.

Vroooooooooooooooooooooom.

Without bothering to say goodbye, Jutarou sped off on the red motorbike. He'd ridden motorbikes in the past, but this was, of course, his first time on a mailbike. The difference, he discovered, was insignificant. The only real problem was that it stood out. He considered stealing the postman's uniform, but he didn't have time for that. His number one priority was getting away. Once he had put some distance between himself and the people on the bus, then he could worry about acquiring a less conspicuous means of transportation.

"H-Hey! Stop!" the mailman shouted, running after the speeding bike. The pain in his neck seemed to have vanished.

Makoto had managed to step off the bus, but that was as far as he got. He stood on the street, watching the scene unfold in silence. All he could think about was that he wanted nothing more to do with any of this. He didn't necessarily *want* Jutarou to escape, he just couldn't think of any reason he needed to continue to be involved in the situation. At worst, Jutarou would get caught and hold a grudge against him.

Compared to what might happen if he *did* keep chasing after Jutarou, Makoto thought that was the best course of action. That was the perfectly normal conclusion his abnormally average high-school mind reached. He was no hero, just a regular high-school boy—or at least he was in that moment.

Makoto Naegi wanted nothing more than for the entire incident to tie itself up somewhere he *wasn't*. Which is why he just stood there as Jutarou sped away.

It's all over, he thought, letting out a heavy sigh. *Things can go back to normal now. My boring, peaceful everyday life.* The tension in his muscles slowly began to release—and just seconds later, he bore witness to something he could hardly believe.

Out of nowhere, Jutarou's stolen motorbike flipped over.

Hub? What?

Before his mind had time to process what he was seeing, an intense roar filled the air—the sound of an explosion. Makoto trembled, and then braced himself. His eyes were partly blocked by his own hands, but he could still see the overturned mailbike spewing black smoke and orange flames.

What? What? What?

Things were making less and less sense. He stood there, stupefied, staring at the blaze.

"N-No!" shouted the mailman, bringing Makoto back to his senses. The mailman rushed over toward the burning motorbike, and that was when Makoto finally realized that what he was seeing was *actually* happening.

He gulped, then muttered inaudibly, "What the..." As if the flames had their own gravity, Makoto was drawn to the wreckage. He stumbled forward along the street. A few uncertain steps later, his foot collided with something.

A burst aluminum can rattled across the asphalt. The can was folded inward, as though it had been stepped on. There were skid marks on the road near the crushed can.

"...Ah."

Memories came flooding back to him. The ripped plastic grocery bags. The scattered drinks. The fact that he

hadn't managed to gather everything he had lost.

And then it clicked.

The drink cans he dropped—at least one of them rolled out into the road, which he never ended up retrieving. Jutarou, in his attempt to escape, ran over the can with the motorbike and lost his balance.

In other words, the catastrophe unfolding before him was, yet again, the result of Makoto's bad luck. Just moments earlier, he had prayed he would have nothing more to do with the situation. And who knew, perhaps it had happened precisely *because* he had made that wish.

The number of coincidences that had been necessary to reach this point seemed almost fantastical. But that hadn't stopped it from happening. As unrealistic as it felt, it was, in fact, reality. How "believable" it was didn't matter—all that meant was that Makoto Naegi's misfortune was strong enough to *make* it happen.

Jutarou lay unconscious on the ground a short distance from Makoto. At a glance, he didn't appear to be badly injured—physically, at least. Emotionally, well, that was another story. He had most likely suffered a nearly fatal blow to his pride. The incident taught him a painful lesson: that no plan—no matter how intricately constructed—was any match for luck.

Jutarou Akafuku failed for one reason, and one reason only: Makoto Naegi's bad luck was more powerful than his own good luck. Up against Makoto's preposterously bad luck, Jutarou's carefully laid plans were of no use. As desperately as he tried to eliminate chance as a factor, it was all in vain. No amount of hard work or raw talent was enough to overcome such an enormous, overwhelming degree of misfortune.

Everything he had believed up to that point had probably come crumbling down. When he finally woke up, he would probably do so with a renewed fear of luck. Moving forward, he would have to look at things differently—not only on jobs, but in his everyday life as well.

Meanwhile, the boy who caused all of this—the horribly unlucky high-school boy who inflicted those mental wounds upon him—let out a sigh and slumped his shoulders. He felt bad about what he had done, and what his actions had led to.

The postman's motorbike continued to burn bright red in the street—and so did all the mail it had been carrying. The mailman paced back and forth near the blaze, muttering, "O-Oh no... How could this happen?"

As he watched the mailman, Makoto felt even worse.

Soon after, he heard the sound of a siren blaring in the distance. He let out another sigh, listening to the siren draw near.

This next part isn't going to be much fun, either, he thought, having a good idea of what laid ahead for him. And his prediction was right on the money.

"God," he muttered. "Worst day ever."

That day—that almost disgustingly beautiful day—was, without a doubt, the very worst day of Makoto Naegi's life. However, he had still yet to learn the *real* reason that particular day was the worst day of his life. After all, the day's greatest misfortune had not yet struck him—in fact, the gears had only just begun turning.

The mailman's bike, and the parcels it was carrying, burned furiously on the street, signaling the start of Makoto's *true* greatest misfortune.



"Understood," echoed an old man's voice. As before, they were assembled in the Kibougamine Academy Board of Directors' personal conference room—the room with the large, round, wooden table, the red carpet, and the thick curtains over the windows. The air in the room was heavy and overbearing.

"What do you plan to do about it?" came another old man.

"Hmph. Is that even a question? We just send another invitation. It's not like the *recipient* went up in flames," the third member of the Board said irritably. He clearly wanted to spend as little time as possible discussing this.

"It's not that simple," said the headmaster, drawing the gaze of the entire Board. "Unfortunately, we cannot have her attend Kibougamine Academy as the Super Duper High School Luckster."

An eyebrow raised. "What do you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I said," the headmaster said calmly. "That parcel *should have* reached its destination unhindered. The fact that it did not is, without question, unlucky. While she, herself, may have done nothing wrong, her stroke of bad luck is a sign that there is someone else out there more deserving of the honor than her. We cannot ignore this."

"Are you saying we draw another name?"

The headmaster nodded. "Her misfortune prevented her from receiving our invitation. If we were talking about any other talent, things would be different, but we're trying to select the Super Duper High School Luckster. We have no choice but to hold another lottery and give the title to the person who truly deserves it."

"Knowing you, I'm sure you've already picked another name."

The headmaster chuckled. "I've even sent the acceptance letter. It could very well arrive before the end of the day."

The Board of Directors couldn't hide their surprise.

"News of the accident only arrived this evening. Are you saying you immediately conducted another drawing, prepared the paperwork, and mailed it out?"

"It's not a good idea to put things like this off," the headmaster said. While he didn't make a big show of it, the headmaster was always abnormally quick to act.

"Now here's a man who loves his job," snarked one of the Board members, but the headmaster didn't react. Instead, he reached down and picked up a single sheet of paper.

"As a result of this evening's postal accident, Kibougamine Academy has once again selected a single name, by fair and unbiased lottery, from all currently enrolled high-school students nationwide, to invite to attend the school as the Super Duper High School Luckster. The name we have drawn"—the headmaster took a short breath, then continued—"is Makoto Naegi."



It was after 10:00 P.M. Makoto had spent the better part of six hours giving his testimony. He was so exhausted, he didn't even have the energy to retort when his mother picked him up at the police station and started scolding him.

What a terrible day, he complained to himself, letting out another sigh as he and his mother left the station. *I completely missed that music show too*, he thought, remembering the TV program an old classmate of his was supposed to appear in. It wasn't the end of the world, though—she would most likely make many television appearances in the coming months. She was, after all, a member of an incredibly popular girl group.

What Makoto *really* wanted to do was sleep. He wanted to go home, collapse into his bed, and put the worst day ever behind him as soon as humanly possible.

He did still have one thing to take care of tomorrow: apologizing to the guys he had left at the park. They probably assumed he'd pocketed their money and ditched them. He doubted they were happy, and he was sure he was in for a rough time convincing them of what had *actually* happened.

The very thought of what lay ahead for him multiplied Makoto's exhaustion. Seeing her son's dejected face, Makoto's mother did something unusual and hailed a taxi. The Naegi family tended to be rather frugal, but she must have felt bad enough for him to make an exception.

The drive from the station to their house took around thirty minutes, and the whole way, Makoto stared out the window at the scenery rushing past and prayed that nothing else would happen. It was only natural, considering how unlucky he had been that day. The air in the taxi was so tense, Makoto almost wished they had taken the train instead, like always.

But Makoto's worries were for naught. They arrived home in one piece. As he and his mother climbed out of the taxi, Makoto let out a sigh of relief. When he opened the front door—

"M-Makoto! Big news! Big, big news!" his younger sister shouted, charging him. Her face was red as a tomato.

"N-News?" Makoto asked, his body tensing up.

"U-Umm, uh, I, uh, y-you... you promise you won't freak out?"

"Who's the one freaking out?"

"Good point," she said. She rested her hand on her chest, took several deep breaths, and then muttered, "Imagine everyone in their underwear," under her breath three times. "H-Here. Look at this," she finally said, extending her shaking right hand toward him. She was holding a white envelope.

"What is this?" Makoto asked, taking the parcel from his sister's hand and examining it. The envelope was a fairly thick paper, and "Mr. Makoto Naegi" was printed in large letters on the front. It was, indeed, addressed to him, but he didn't get what the big deal was.

"Th-The back," his sister said. "Look at the back."

"The back?" Makoto parroted, then flipped the envelope over. "Huh?!" he shouted, completely caught off-guard.

“Kibougamine Academy Administrative Office” was printed on the reverse side of the envelope. “Kibougamine Academy? *That* Kibougamine Academy?”

“Yeah! The one and only!” his sister squealed, bouncing up and down like a rabbit. “Inside, it said you were selected to be the Super Duper High School Luckster! You get to go to Kibougamine Academy, Makoto!”

Me? The Super Duper High School Luckster?

The reality of the situation still hadn’t sunk in.

“Hold on,” he said, “you read my mail without my permission?”

“What’s the big deal?” she asked, bringing her face almost uncomfortably close to his. “You’re going to Kibougamine Academy! You know, the school where if you graduate, you’re basically guaranteed success for life! You get to be one of *them*!” She was breathing so hard he could literally feel it.

Seeing how worked up his sister was, it finally clicked.

“I-I’m going... to Kibougamine Academy?” he asked as the unbelievable truth began to sink in. With trembling hands, he reached into the envelope and pulled out the letter. As his eyes raced across the text, he gulped.

“We at Kibougamine Academy have selected by lottery a single candidate from a pool of average students. Your name was chosen, and so we invite you to join us this year as the Super Duper High School Luckster.”

“That’s wonderful, Makoto!” his mother exclaimed from behind him, placing both hands on his shoulders.

“Hip hip, hooray!” his sister shouted, dancing as if *she* had been the one chosen.

“Where’s Dad?” his mother asked. “Is he home?”

“Yeah, he’s on the phone with Grandma and Grandpa!”

“They definitely need to know!”

Makoto’s mom and sister squealed in unison, joined hands, and did a little dance. As he watched his family rejoice for him, a smile finally rose to Makoto’s face. He chuckled, pumped his fist, and then started cheering.

“Y-Yeah... Yeah.” At first, he was just muttering to himself, but eventually he too raised his voice in excitement. “Yeah!” he shouted with everything he had. What had been a day of nothing but misfortune had been flipped entirely on its head with one gigantic stroke of good luck. He saw the invitation as a gift from fate—an undeniable reversal of his unluckiness.

However, the reality of it was quite different. It wasn’t good luck that had led to his selection as the Super Duper High School Luckster—but very, very bad luck. Had he not been chosen, he would have never met that strange mechanical bear, and he would have never been made to participate in the academic coliseum.

He would have never experienced any of those hopelessly despair-ridden events.

But he was chosen. He was selected to be the Super Duper High School Luckster. And that, more than anything else, was what truly made those twenty-four hours the worst day of Makoto Naegi’s life.

At that point in time, though, Makoto didn’t even have an inkling of a premonition of what was to come. He spent the evening celebrating with his family.

But that’s perfectly natural. After all, this is a tale of something that happened before anything had happened yet.

And thus Makoto Naegi's worst day ever drew to an end.

He concluded the day... with a smile.

Makoto Naegi, the Super Duper High School Luckster:

Welcome to Kibougamine Academy.

